

WALNUT CREEK CONTRA COSTA TIMES (CA)
14 August 1982

Former chief of CIA criticizes arms freeze

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CONCORD — Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner said Friday a nuclear arms freeze could undermine American defenses and that Soviet compliance with the limitation couldn't be verified.

Turner, who spoke before the Concord Century Club, also said in an interview before his speech that President Reagan's decision to allow limited CIA spying within the United States was a mistake that could come back to haunt the agency.

Turner, who was head of the Central Intelligence Agency under President Carter, said neither the United States nor the Soviet Union has the ability to determine if the other side is honoring a nuclear freeze like that proposed in a voter initiative scheduled for the California ballot in November.

"We were pressing the limits of verifiability in the (proposed) Salt II treaty," he said. "The problem is that some weapons can be made too small for verifiability."

An arms freeze could place the United States in jeopardy of losing its nuclear deterrent against a Soviet first attack, he commented. He said the nation's land-based missiles, which comprise one-third of U.S. nuclear weapons, are already "rather vulnerable."

"If during a freeze the Russians developed a means of detecting the other two-thirds of our nuclear capability, then we would be in a difficult spot if we were prevented from developing a new weapons system," he said.

During his speech before a large crowd at the Concord Inn, Turner mentioned nuclear arms as one of several "long-term issues" the United States must resolve. He said the nation must decide whether it needs a nuclear capability that is basically a deterrent against a first strike or one which can be used to "fight with nuclear weapons on a larger and larger scale."

Earlier he said that he believes the United States and the Soviet Union should enter a treaty that moves away from first strike capabilities, especially through limits on land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Reagan's decision last year to allow the CIA to use clandestine operations under certain circumstances in the United States was "a bad idea," according to Turner.

By executive order, Reagan has let CIA agents and their informants pose as someone else to gather foreign intelligence from American citizens. Turner said that decision would do little to help the agency's intelligence gathering and could lead to the distrust of American citizens.

Turner said he considers the CIA a "first-class" intelligence agency. The greatest threat to the agency, he said, would be a recurrence of "the intense public criticism" the CIA underwent in the mid-1970s.

Public criticism of the agency was at its height when he became director in 1977, he said, adding he believes much of the bad publicity was "blown out of proportion."

"I can't tell you how painful it was to pick up the morning newspaper," he recalled of his first year at the helm of the CIA.

"The one thing that the CIA cannot afford is another period of intense criticism and hype by the media," he said.

Turner also criticized Reagan's decision to oppose construction of an oil pipeline from the Soviet Union to Western Europe. He said the decision has alienated American allies at a time when they're needed to spend more money on conventional NATO military forces.

Further, the United States government is frequently remiss in its long-range planning, according to Turner, who served as Commander of Allied Forces in Southern Europe from 1974 to 1977.

The country's reluctance to tackle the Palestinian question in the Middle East, he said, has led to the current fighting in Beirut. Turner said he believes "Israel's use of force has been unnecessarily heavy" during its invasion of Lebanon.

He said the United States should reevaluate whether its commitment to Israel would be best served through more military aid or by insisting that "we move ahead with the Palestinian issue as a first step to a permanent peace in the Middle East."

Moderate Arab leaders in such countries as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt are finding themselves "squeezed" by the Palestinian problem on one hand and Iran's radical religious revolution on the other, he said.